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UNCLAS RECIFE 000150

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DS/CC, DS/ICI/PII, DS/IP/ITA, DS/IP/WHA, BRASILIA
FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO VIOLENT PROTEST AT RECIFE CONSULATE DURING
PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

REF: RIO DE JANEIRO 1167, SAO PAULO 1248

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

11. (SBU) Summary: Demonstrators protesting President Bush's visit to Brazil marched on the U.S. Consulate in Recife -- peacefully on Friday November 4 and violently the next day. The second group of approximately 200 protesters included members of the Landless Movement (MST), who came armed with sticks, stones and a sickle. Despite a valiant effort by two policemen, the leaders cracked the security glass of the Consulate guard booth, covered the walls with red paint and attacked the policeman who tried to arrest the perpetrators. After analyzing surveillance tapes, the Consul met with the state police commander and then requested an investigation by Federal Police. In a public diplomacy effort to prevent violence at future demonstrations, the Consul gave interviews to local TV and newspapers pointing out the importance of rule of law to guarantee freedom of expression and public safety. End Summary

12. (U) On November 3, the Consulate learned that a demonstration against the presidential visit was being planned for the next day. A warden message advised Americans to avoid the area and take precautions. Police protection was requested. The small group of 50 demonstrators who marched on November 4 were peaceful, limiting their action to burning an effigy on a donkey cart.

13. (SBU) Rumors of a second demonstration reached the Consulate the same day, and PSO advised the police that the Saturday march, starting from the bankworkers union, would mobilize several hundred protestors. Due to a major soccer game, police sent only one patrol car to the Consulate at the last moment. The regional leader of the Landless Movement (MST), Jaime Amorim, can be seen on the Consulate's surveillance tapes, giving orders and taking a stick to one of the policemen. Amorim later spoke to reporters who came to cover the protest, charging that police threatened his group with their guns. The tapes clearly show the police evading blows and retreating immediately after the attack led by Amorim. The windshield of the patrol car was smashed.

14. (U) After consultations with RSO and Embassy Brasilia, the Recife Consulate asked for a meeting with the commander of Pernambuco's uniformed police (policia militar) Col. Claudio Jose da Silva. Da Silva agreed that in the future more police protection would be provided and the street could be closed to head off the march. He noted that only the Federal Police could open an investigation into the attack on the Consulate, according to international law. In a meeting with Federal Police Superintendent Bergson Toledo Silva, the consul turned over the surveillance tapes and the football-size stone that badly cracked the security booth glass. The Federal Police asked for an official request to prosecute those responsible for the damage to the Consulate and said charges made by the Pernambuco police would be adjudicated together with the Consulate's complaint. Police leadership welcomed the Consulate's effort to provide evidence and to draw the line against violence.

15. (U) As the Consul pointed out to the police, legal action could have limited results unless public opinion can be mobilized on the side of the law. The police agreed that copies of the tapes, showing the violent attack on the Consulate, could be made available to television reporters. Both evening and morning newscasts of the local TV Globo and SBT affiliates showed the footage of the attack and quotes from the consul to the effect that action by a few delinquents endangers both peaceful protestors and passersbys. Both major newspapers in Recife carried the story November 9 on the Consulate's request for a police investigation and noted the inadequate protection given to the diplomatic mission.

16. (SBU) Comment: The violence was premeditated and the leaders can clearly be identified. In the spirit of zero tolerance for threats to U.S. citizens and missions, the Consulate hopes to ensure that those who plan to use violence will now know that there will be consequences for any future attack.